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Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and to the special session of the General Assembly entitled "Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century": implementation of strategic objectives and action in critical areas of concern and further actions and initiatives: equal participation of women and men in decision-making processes at all levels

Draft agreed conclusions submitted by the Chairperson of the Commission on the Status of Women

Equal participation of women and men in decision-making processes at all levels

1. The Commission on the Status of Women reaffirms the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action,[1] which emphasizes that without the active participation of women and the incorporation of women's perspectives at all levels of decision-making, the goals of equality, development and peace cannot be achieved, and that women's equal participation is a necessary condition for women's and girls' interests to be taken into account and is needed in order to strengthen democracy and promote its proper functioning.

2. The Commission reaffirms the outcome document adopted at the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly,[2] paragraph 23 of which acknowledges that despite general acceptance of the need for gender balance in decision-making bodies at all levels, a gap between de jure and de facto equality has persisted, and that women continue to be underrepresented in legislative, ministerial and sub-ministerial levels, as well as at the highest levels of the corporate sector and other economic and social institutions, and drew attention to the obstacles that hinder women's entry into decision-making positions.

[1] *Report of the Fourth World Conference on Women, Beijing 4-15 September 1995* (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.96.IV.13), para. 181.

[2] Resolution S-23/3, annex.

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3. The Commission further reaffirms the commitment to the equal participation of women and men in public life enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the Convention on the Political Rights of Women,[3] which states that women shall be, on equal terms with men and without any discrimination, entitled to vote in all elections, eligible for election to all publicly elected bodies established by national law and entitled to hold public office and to exercise all public functions established by national law.

4. The Commission recalls the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, which states, inter alia, that States parties should take all appropriate measures, including positive measures and temporary special measures, to eliminate discrimination against women and girls in the political and public life of the country.[4]

5. The Commission urges States parties to comply fully with their obligations under the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and the Optional Protocol thereto and to take into consideration the concluding comments as well as the general recommendations of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women.[5]

6. The Commission notes that some States parties have modified their reservations, expresses satisfaction that some reservations have been withdrawn and urges States parties to limit the extent of any reservations that they lodge to the Convention, to formulate any such reservations as precisely and as narrowly as possible, to ensure that no reservations are incompatible with the object and purpose of the Convention, to review their reservations regularly with a view to withdrawing them and to withdraw reservations that are contrary to the object and purpose of the Convention.[6]

7. The Commission recalls paragraph 1 of resolution 58/142 of 22 December 2003 on women and political participation, in which the General Assembly urges all stakeholders to develop a comprehensive set of programmes and policies to increase women's participation, especially in political decision-making.

8. The Commission also recalls that its agreed conclusions 1997/2 on women in power and decision-making recognizes the need to accelerate the implementation of strategies that promote gender balance in political decision-making and to mainstream a gender perspective in all stages of policy formulation and decision-making.

9. The Commission welcomes the 2005 World Summit, which reaffirmed that the full and effective implementation of the goals and objectives of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action was an essential contribution to achieving the internationally agreed development goals, including Millennium Development Goals, and resolved to promote increased representation of women in Government decision-making bodies, including through ensuring their equal opportunity to participate fully in the political process.[7]

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[3] Resolution 217 A (III), resolution 2200 A (XXI), annex, and resolution 640 (VII), annex.

[4] Resolution 34/180, annex.

[5] General Assembly resolution 60/230, para. 4.

[6] Ibid., para. 6.

[7] Resolution 60/1, para. 58.

10. The Commission recognizes that some progress has been achieved since the Fourth World Conference on Women in women's participation in decision-making at all levels. Introduction of policies and programmes, including positive measures, at the local, national and international levels, has resulted in an increase in women's participation in decision-making processes.

11. The Commission expresses concern at the serious and persistent obstacles, which are many and varied in nature, that still hinder the advancement of women and further affect their participation in decision-making processes, including, inter alia, the persistent feminization of poverty, lack of equal access to health, education, training, employment, armed conflict, lack of security, and natural disasters.

12. The Commission underlines the importance of the empowerment of women and their effective participation in decision- and policymaking processes as critical tools to prevent and eliminate gender-based violence, and further recognizes that eliminating all forms of violence against women and girls enables them to participate equally in decision-making.

13. The Commission further expresses concern about the lack of sufficient information and sex-disaggregated data at the local, national, regional and international levels on the participation of women and men in decision-making processes in all areas, including the economy, the public and private sector, the judiciary, international affairs, academia, trade unions, the media, non-governmental organizations, and others.

14. The Commission reaffirms the important role of women in the prevention and resolution of conflicts and in peacebuilding, and stresses the importance of their full and equal participation in all efforts to maintain and promote peace and security and the need to increase their role in decision-making with regard to conflict prevention and resolution and the rebuilding of post-conflict society, in accordance with Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) of 31 October 2000 and the relevant resolutions of the General Assembly.[8]

15. The Commission recognizes that gender equality, development and peace are key issues for the promotion of women, and that new efforts are needed by all actors to create an enabling environment in decision-making.

16. The Commission reaffirms the urgent goal of achieving 50/50 gender distribution in all categories of posts within the United Nations system, especially at senior and policymaking levels, with full respect for the principle of equitable geographical distribution, in conformity with Article 101, paragraph 3, of the Charter of the United Nations, and also taking into account the continuing lack of representation of underrepresentation of women from certain countries, in particular from developing countries, from countries with economies in transition and from unrepresented or largely underrepresented Member States.[9]

17. The Commission urges Governments, and/or, as appropriate, the relevant entities of the United Nations system, other international and regional organizations, including the international financial institutions, national parliaments, political parties, civil society, including the private sector, trade unions, academia, the media, non-governmental organizations, and other actors, to take the following actions:

[8] See resolution 58/142, preamble.

[9] See General Assembly resolution 58/144, para. 3.

(a) Ensure that women have the right to vote and exercise this right without duress, persuasion or coercion;

(b) Review, as appropriate, existing legislation, including electoral law, and remove or modify, as appropriate, provisions that hinder women's equal participation in decision-making, and adopt positive actions and temporary special measures, as appropriate, to enhance women's equal participation in decision-making processes at all levels;

(c) Establish concrete goals, targets and benchmarks for achieving equal participation of women and men in decision-making bodies at all levels and in all areas, especially in areas of macroeconomic policy, trade, labour, budgets, defence and foreign affairs, media, judiciary, including through positive actions and temporary special measures, as appropriate;

(d) Develop and fund policies and programmes, including innovative measures, to build a critical mass of women leaders, executives and managers, with the goal of achieving a gender balance at all levels and in all areas, in particular in strategic economic, social and political decision-making positions;

(e) Establish the goal of gender balance in decision-making in administration and public appointments at all levels, develop alternative approaches and changes in institutional structures and practices, including gender action plans, which establish concrete strategies and budgets for the achievement of consistent gender mainstreaming as a strategy for promoting gender equality objectives, in legislation and public policies, among others;

(f) Ensure women's full and equal participation and representation at all decision-making levels in all aspects of peace processes and in post-conflict peacebuilding, reconstruction, rehabilitation and reconciliation processes;

(g) Encourage greater involvement of all marginalized women in decision-making at all levels and address and counter the barriers faced by marginalized women in accessing and participating in politics and decision-making;[10]

(h) Ensure that gender perspectives are incorporated in development policies and programmes, and in the implementation of the Millennium Development Goals, to ensure that women and all other members of society benefit from development and that women are empowered to assume leadership positions;

(i) Promote and strengthen international cooperation to accelerate the development process in which women play a key role and should be equal beneficiaries;

(j) Introduce more effective measures aimed at eradicating poverty of women and improving their living conditions, to promote the realization of their full human potential to enable their advancement and their equal participation in decision-making;

(k) Ensure that women and girls have equal access to education in all forms and ensure that education is gender-sensitive, and further promote educational programmes in which women and girls will be equipped with the necessary

[10] General Assembly resolution 58/142, para. 1 (k).

knowledge and will be prepared to participate equally in decision-making processes in all spheres of life and at all levels;

(l) Ensure women's and girls' access to training that enables them to develop their skills, capacities and expertise to exercise leadership, including tools, training and special programmes necessary to enter, inter alia, into politics, including at the highest levels, recognizing existing power differentials in society and the need to respect different positive models of leadership;

(m) Ensure women's equal access to decent work, full and productive employment, productive and financial resources and information, in order to facilitate their full and equal participation in decision-making processes at all levels;

(n) Introduce objective and transparent procedures for recruitment and gender-sensitive career planning to enable women to assume decision-making positions at all levels and in all areas in order to break the glass ceiling;[11]

(o) Eliminate occupational segregation, gender wage gaps, as well as discrimination against women, including marginalized women, in the labour market, through legal and policy measures, including by increasing opportunities for women and girls as well as men and boys to work in non-traditional sectors;

(p) Ensure women's access to microcredit and microfinance schemes, which have proven to be effective means to empower women and can create an enabling environment to facilitate their full and equal participation in the decision-making processes at all levels, particularly at the grass-roots level;

(q) Foster an enabling environment in decision-making processes at all levels, including through measures aimed at reconciling family and employment responsibilities, inter alia, by better sharing of paid and unpaid work between women and men;

(r) Take measures to prevent and eliminate all forms of violence against women and girls in order to promote their full and equal participation in public and political life;

(s) Promote women's leadership in all areas and at all levels and remove all barriers that directly or indirectly hinder the participation of women, in order to increase the visibility and influence of women in decision-making processes;

(t) Facilitate networking and mentoring among women leaders and girls, as appropriate, at all levels and in all areas, including in politics, academia, trade unions, the media and civil society organizations, specifically women's groups and networks, including through the use of information and communication technology, as appropriate;

(u) Encourage, particularly among men as well as women in decision-making positions, the promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of women and support women's participation, representation and leadership in decision-making processes at all levels, including the exchange of best practices and awareness-raising;

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[11] Commission on the Status of Women agreed conclusions 1997/3, para. 10.

(v) Develop strategies to increase the involvement of men and boys in promoting gender equality and the empowerment of women, through, inter alia, encouraging the sharing of household work and care;

(w) Develop strategies to eliminate gender stereotypes in all spheres of life, particularly in the media, and foster the positive portrayal of women and girls as leaders and decision makers on all levels and in all areas;

(x) Recognize the importance of women's participation in decision-making in all areas, including the political process, provide fair and balanced coverage of male and female candidates, cover participation in women's political organizations and ensure coverage of issues that have a particular impact on women;[12]

(y) Adopt clear rules, as necessary, for candidate selection within parties, including, as appropriate, the implementation of concrete goals, targets and benchmarks, including, where appropriate, temporary special measures, such as quotas, for achieving equitable representation of women candidates in elected positions;

(z) Promote women's candidacies in elections, inter alia and as appropriate, through the adoption of specific measures, such as training programmes and recruitment drives and, as a temporary special measure, consider funding for women candidates;

(aa) Make efforts to ensure equal opportunities during election campaigns, including equal access to the media and to financial and other resources, as appropriate;

(bb) Facilitate the inclusion of women in decision-making positions within electoral management bodies and observer commissions and give consideration to gender equality and the empowerment of women in the structure and activities of such bodies;

(cc) Consider establishing parliamentary standing or ad hoc committees or other statutory bodies on gender equality and empowerment of women, with cross-party representation, where appropriate, to monitor and review the implementation of existing laws and constitutional provisions, in line with the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, where applicable, and the commitments to implement the Beijing Platform for Action and the outcome document of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly, as well as taking into account recommendations of the Committee on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, where applicable;

(dd) Consider ratifying and implementing relevant instruments relating to full political, economic, social and cultural rights for women and girls, especially the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, and the Convention on the Rights of the Child;

(ee) Reaffirm the Universal Declaration of Human Rights as a vital instrument for the advancement of women; and in this regard take measures to

[12] General Assembly resolution 58/142, para. 2 (m).

achieve the Millennium Development Goals and other internationally agreed development goals;

(ff) Encourage public dissemination of national periodic reports to the Committee on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, as well as concluding comments provided by the Committee;

(gg) Promote collaboration among all relevant actors, such as parliaments, national machineries for the advancement of women and other relevant national mechanisms and women's groups and networks in civil society to advance gender equality and the empowerment of women;

(hh) Support the mainstreaming of a gender perspective at all levels and stages of the budgetary process, including through awareness-raising and training, where appropriate;

(ii) Strengthen research, monitoring and evaluation of the progress of women's participation in decision-making at all levels, in particular in areas where there is a dearth of information, including, as appropriate, through the development of acceptable standardized methodology for systematic collection of gender-specific data and statistics, disaggregated by sex and other relevant factors; and disseminate lessons learned and full practices;

(jj) Ensure political will to recognize the role of women in development in all spheres of life, to promote gender equality and favour the participation of women in decision-making positions.